
New Mexico grape growers unite

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New Mexico grape growers unite to increase production, with help of Northern New Mexico Connect

Over the last decade, a string of wineries has come to grace the scenic High Road to Taos. In 2010, Robert Naranjo, network facilitator for the Greater Espanola Valley Community Development Corporation (GEVCDC), was asked to find local grape growers to supply the wineries. "It's interesting to note that New Mexico has the longest history of wine production in the US," Naranjo says. "The legacy began in 1629 when a Franciscan friar planted the first Mission grapes south of Socorro."

With funding from Northern New Mexico Connect and matching funds from Rio Arriba County, Naranjo and GEVCDC President Lucia Sanchez helped to organize the Northern New Mexico Micro Grape Growers Association, which consists of 17

producers from Española and the villages of El Llano, La Mesilla, La Villita, Los Luceros, El Guique, Velarde, Hernandez and Dixon. The Association is focused on micro growers because most of land holdings in Rio Arriba County are between one and five acres in size. “Growing grapes gives us the opportunity to put small parcels of land back into production and to protect our water rights,” says Sanchez, who is also a micro grower.

At the request of the wineries, the Association is focusing on Petite Syrah, Riesling, and Malbec. Grapes grown in the area are said to be sweeter because they mature more slowly with the cooler temperatures. It will take two more years before Association members harvest and sell the grapes. “In the meantime, Northern New Mexico Connect has planted the seeds for an important model of local agricultural production,” says Association President Tim Martinez.

Los Alamos National Laboratory

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(505) 667-7000

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